

23 Law Firms Have Strongest Relationships With Clients

By **Andrew Strickler**

Law360, New York (March 26, 2014, 6:48 PM ET) -- BigLaw firms that seized the opportunity in the post-financial crisis years to get serious about forging deeper bonds with clients are seeing their efforts pay off, according to a corporate counsel survey and firm ranking released Wednesday.

The firms leading the 2014 BTI Client Relationship Scorecard report by The BTI Consulting Group (Wellesley, Mass.) distinguished themselves to major clients through a sustained effort over several years to know their clients and their businesses, and through investment in training and other internal initiatives that helped the firms meet those needs, said Michael Rynowecer, president of BTI.

The top-ranked "Power Elite" firms with the largest number of strong client relationships — a pack led by Jones Day — used the post-financial crash years to launch or augment business training programs for partners.

The firms emphasized industry knowledge. Detailed client feedback was used as building blocks for client-specific service plans that were then integrated into firmwide strategies.

Most importantly, the firms kept at the hard work of deepening client relationships and improving service, year after year.

"These firms had the most strategic discipline," Rynowecer said. "They stuck with these programs, they changed them and changed them again to make them successful, and they kept investing in them. At this point, it's part of who these firms are."

Following Jones Day in rank order were Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP, Kirkland & Ellis LLP and Littler Mendelson PC. Completing the top 10 were Sidley Austin LLP, Hogan Lovells, McGuireWoods LLP, K&L Gates LLP and Seyfarth Shaw LLP.

The ranking was based on telephone interviews conducted in March and July 2013 with more than 500 general counsel and chief legal officers or their direct reports, according to BTI.

The scoring system included six factors related to each firm's status as a primary or secondary provider; recommendation rates; and the potential overlap of a single firm as both a leading primary firm and as the first firm to get a GC's unprompted recommendation.

The value of those personal recommendations and a firm's place on a provider list has only increased in the post-financial crisis years.

While a typical large organization represented in the survey works with 46 outside law firms, just two, referred to as primary providers, captured the majority of billable work — five times that of all the other firms. But those top spots are slippery: More than 48 percent of corporate counsel had replaced a primary provider within the last year.

Fifty-seven percent of corporate counsel say they would hire a law firm based on a single unprompted recommendation from a peer, according to BTI.

"In a market where you can only grow by stealing clients, there is no better sales force than my clients telling other clients to use me," he said.

This year's BTI ranking — the last such survey was done in 2009 — shows many firms making major leaps through the ranks. Littler, for example, was ranked 43rd in the previous scorecard, while McGuire Woods, now ranked eighth, was 26th in 2009.

The firms ranked 11th through 23rd in the Power Elite category were Reed Smith LLP, Gibson Dunn, Mayer Brown LLP, Jenner & Block LLP, Latham & Watkins LLP, Faegre Baker Daniels LLP, Norton Rose Fulbright, Morrison & Foerster LLP, Ogletree Deakins Nash Smoak & Stewart PC, DLA Piper, McDermott Will & Emery LLP, Jackson Lewis PC and Greenberg Traurig LLP.

Another group of "Power Players" positioned to take top spots was led by Allston & Bird LLP, Baker & McKenzie LLP, Baker Botts LLP, BakerHostetler and Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott LLP.

--Editing by Edrienne Su.

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